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SALESWOMEN IN MERCANTILE STORES.

SALESWOMEN IN MERCANTILE STORES. ELIZABETH BEARDSLEY BUTLER.
CHARITIES PUBLICATION COMMITTEE. NEW YORK, 1912.
CLOTH, \$1.08; PAPER, \$.75, PREPAID.

Three years ago, at the invitation of the Consumers' League of Maryland, the Russell Sage Foundation made an investigation of the employment of saleswomen in mercantile establishments in Baltimore. Though belated in its appearance and dealing with special conditions in a single city, the report is nevertheless of value as representing what is largely true in mercantile life at the present time.

This investigation was conducted by Miss Elizabeth B. Butler, who had previously made a study, for the Pittsburg Survey, of the working conditions of women in Pittsburg, under the title of "Women and the Trades."

The study made in Baltimore, which included all stores having seven or more female employees, dealt with thirty-four establishments in which were employed four thousand girls and women. Some of these stores were conducted in old buildings and under adverse conditions.

In the preface the purpose and scope of the volume are briefly stated:—"It is hoped that the volume will enable the public as well as employers in Baltimore to understand local working conditions better and lead them to give more thoughtful attention to questions affecting employees and store management; it will be suggestive to other cities, and is an example of fair and careful work which should be imitated elsewhere. Sweeping conclusions must not, however, be rashly drawn from so limited a study. For a wider view the interesting volume entitled 'Wage-Earning Women in Stores and Factories' recently issued by the United States Department of Commerce and Labor should be consulted. This gives in more condensed form facts gathered in various cities."

The investigator spent months in a personal study of the stores, observing all features of employment, the plans and methods of store management, and the attitude and experiences of employees. Cards of investigation were used and results were tabulated.

It was found that of the persons employed 68.57 per cent. were girls and women, and 31.41 per cent., boys and men. These figures agree very closely with those obtained in the local studies recently made by the Vocation Bureau of Boston and seem to indicate the relative numbers found in general at the present time in establishments where women may be employed behind the counter. The superior qualities of women for this kind of service, their tact, perception, patience, attractiveness, and special aptitude for selling many kinds of goods have fixed their place in what is probably a permanent proportion. Certain work belongs distinctively to men, and they appear to be holding their relative proportion.

Saleswomen constituted 54.78 per cent. of women employees, and buyers 1.67 per cent.

Particular attention was given to heating, lighting, ventilation, the provision of seats for saleswomen, and the steps taken for their welfare generally. Lines of advancement for women are clearly indicated.

The results in the matter of hours of labor are interesting. Instead of a 54 hour week, the highest claimed by any one of the thirty-four stores, the actual range was from 51 hours to 59; and in the holiday season the variation was from 60 to 80 hours. It is evident that at the time of the investigation there was little enforcement of labor regulations in the City of Baltimore. In few cases were there shifts of help; in most, girls and women served through the lengthened day. In numbers employed seasonal changes produced a variation of 36 per cent., which is generally true in mercantile establishments.

Perhaps the most vital feature of the study made is that of wages. The weekly wage limits were \$2.00 and \$25.00. Of the 4000 female employees considered, 350 received \$3.00 or less; 750, from \$3.00 to \$4.00; 450, from \$4.00 to \$5.00; 600, from \$5.00 to \$6.00; 1100, from \$6.00 to \$7.00; 300, from \$7.00 to \$8.00; and so on in rapidly decreasing numbers. From \$6.00 to \$7.00 appears to be the wage of much the largest division of women employed in mercantile establishments. This, also, has been verified by other agencies in research work.

This work relates to a single community, but its value is enhanced by the fact that it is an intensive study, while by comparison and correlation of this and other similar investigations we may obtain valuable light upon the employment conditions of the saleswomen, and of women in mercantile employment.

The study is welcome at this time as a contribution to vocational guidance and to general industrial betterment.

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